

American Communal Societies Quarterly

Volume 4 | Number 4

Pages 237-248

October 2010

Hamilton College Library "Home Notes"

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Hamilton College Library "Home Notes"

Communal Societies Collection New Acquisitions

Harvard Shaker Labels

By M. Stephen Miller

The Shakers were consummate “savers” and recyclers. This is quite fortunate for us because remnants of products that they produced for sale have survived. In many instances, these are the *only* tangible evidence of the products. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Shakers at many eastern communities used advertising broadsides and labels to line, or at times even to construct, storage boxes. Canterbury, Enfield, Harvard, and New Lebanon were among the communities whose boxes this author has been involved in the dismantling of. Perhaps the best known of these was the box from New Lebanon that held the only known examples of their *Lemon Syrup* broadsides.¹

An unfortunate aspect of these fortuitous finds is that these sheets of paper are at extreme risk from those elements that are most damaging to their cotton rag or wood pulp content—moisture and fungal growth (mold and mildew). Light, especially in the ultraviolet (UV) spectrum, is generally not a problem since these storage boxes always have lids. Yet, because these papers are attached to wood, cardboard, or a paste substructure, it is usually necessary to remove them from this environment in order to preserve them. The labels under consideration here are such examples.

The box in question (figs. 1-3) is a simple pine case with butted and nailed corners; its exterior appearance was unremarkable when initially seen and it may not have even been Shaker made. However, when acquired by the author in early 2010, its interior was covered with sheets

of labels—three labels printed on each. Some of the sheets, particularly those overlying knots in the wood or in places where nails pierced them, were damaged to some degree. The example illustrated here (fig. 4), from the Communal Societies Collection of the Hamilton College Library, is among the fully intact sheets that a professional paper conservator was able to painstakingly harvest from the box.²

In the nineteenth century, labels were typically printed in multiples by a letterpress process on standard-size paper and then cut apart. While it is not possible to date these labels with precision, we can infer an approximate date of the 1880s based on their elegant border styles and the fact that “S. T. Atherton”—Simon T. Atherton, the Harvard community’s beloved trustee—died in 1888. The products for which these labels were printed were long-time staples in the Harvard community’s catalogues. The earliest listing was in their catalogue for 1854: “Peach Water and Rose Water, by the Gallon or Bottle.”³ By 1888, neither was offered any longer.

In the nineteenth century, before regular bathing was common practice, these waters were marketed primarily as toilet waters or perfumes. Rose water was also combined with other distillates, such as witch hazel, to make a “tonic” or astringent for use on oily skin. In the twentieth century, by contrast, the waters were more often used as food flavorings. Although little information is found for the Shakers’ manufacture of peach water—the earliest reference found in journals from Harvard dates to October of



Fig. 1. Exterior of a Harvard pine box which was lined with label sheets.

1850—the production of rose water was well documented. The Shakers distilled their waters from oils that were extracted from compressing the petals of the *Rosa gallica officinalis*. This variety was said to be the Shakers' favorite.⁴ In a Harvard journal dated August of 1838, it records "79 gal. rose water this year."⁵

Cayenne pepper has a curious Shaker history. In the 1830s, the New Lebanon and Watervliet, New York communities proudly printed the following rhymed couplet in the front of their herb catalogs: "Why send to Europe's distant shores / For plants which grow at our own doors?" Cayenne came from a pepper plant that grew only in Africa and was imported by them.⁶ The few references found in journals from Harvard all refer to the plants being brought *into* the community. For example, from 1834: "Joseph M. returned [;] he brought 30 hundred bbs (barrels) of Cayenne to be ground."⁷ When the Harvard Shakers published their first bound catalog, in 1845, they offered *Cayenne Afric.* for sale. Cayenne was taken internally for use as "a Stimulant, Rubefacient." In other words, it was used to raise body temperature, increasing nasal secretions and perspiration; it was not used for culinary purposes.

Ephemera are defined as printed material(s) intended for one-time or short-term use. Therefore, these sheets of labels that have survived from well over one hundred years ago should be considered minor miracles. It was the Shakers' nearly obsessive application of a philosophy of "waste not, want not," that allows us today to view evidence of some of their commercial endeavors that otherwise would have been lost forever.

Notes

1. M. Stephen Miller, in *Gather Up the Fragments: The Andrews Shaker Collection*, by Mario S. De Pillis and Christian Goodwillie (Berkshire, Mass.: Hancock Shaker Village; New Haven, Conn.; London: distributed by Yale University Press, 2008), 188-90.
2. Ms. Stephanie H. Ewing-Darcy, Lakeville, Connecticut.
3. Mary L. Richmond, *Shaker Literature: A Bibliography*, Hancock, Mass.: Shaker Community; Hanover, N.H.: distributed by the University Press of New England, 1977. Entry nos. 222 and 232.
4. Galen Beale and Mary Rose Boswell, *The Earth Shall Blossom* (Woodstock, Vt.: The Countryman Press, 1991), p. 177-84.
5. Library, Fruitlands Museums, Harvard, Mass., FM-4.2.
6. Amy Bess Miller, *Shaker Medicinal Herbs: A Compendium of History, Lore, and Uses* (Pownal, Vt.: Hancock Shaker Village and Story Books, 1998), p. 137. See also *Shaker Literature*, entry no. 228.
7. Library, Fruitlands Museums, Harvard, Mass., FM-4.2.



Fig. 2 (above) and 3 (below). Interior of the Harvard pine box lined with label sheets before their removal.



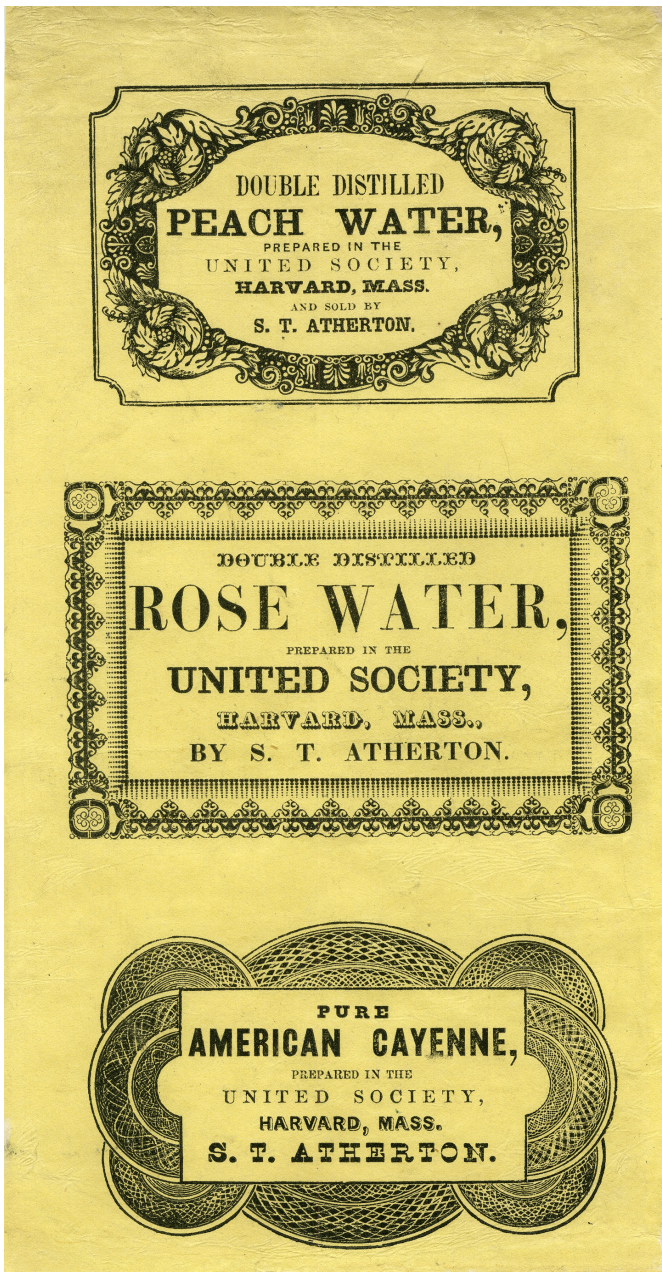


Fig. 4. Three Harvard product labels on one sheet, removed from pine case.
This label sheet is held by the Hamilton College Library.

Earliest Shaker-related imprint west of the Appalachians

By Christian Goodwillie

Hill, Rowland. *Village Dialogues: Between Farmer Littleworth and Thomas Newman, Rev. Mr. Lovegood, Parson Dolittle and Others, by Roland Hill; To which is Added by Another Hand, an Account of the People Known by the Name of Shaking Quakers*. Danville, Ky., 1805. 94, 2 + p.

The preface to the 1808 first edition of the Shakers' *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing* refers to anti-Shaker printed works "published, from a spirit of detraction and slander ... stating facts in an imperfect light [and also] adding the most groundless falsities." Despite the slew of eighteenth century imprints by Valentine, Daniel, and Reuben Rathbun; Amos Taylor; Benjamin West; and prominent newspaper attacks by William Scales and others, the authors of the *Testimony* singled out for special recognition "an anonymous publication printed in Danville (Kentucky) 1805, said to be taken—*From the Theological Magazine*. A specimen of this garbling writer is—that 'The first founder of this wild sect was one JANE LEES: she lived in the town of Manchester, in England; was of low parentage and procured her living at the expense of her chastity. She sustained the character of a woman of ill fame in England, which character she supported in America until her death.'"¹

Until now this item has remained a bibliographic ghost. The account as printed in *The Theological Magazine* in 1795 has long been available to scholars.² Mary Richmond recorded it as item number 3727 in her bibliography *Shaker Literature*. In 1805 the text of this same article was republished as a curious appendage to a series of evangelical vignettes written for theatrical performance entitled *Village Dialogues*, by English preacher and missionary Rowland Hill (misspelled Roland on the title page of this edition). This work was reprinted numerous times in both England and America; however only the Danville edition contains the appended text of the account of the Shakers.

Village Dialogues is the earliest known imprint from Danville, Kentucky. Unfortunately the title page of the sole surviving copy (now in the Communal Societies Collection at Hamilton College) has been trimmed above where a date of imprint presumably appeared, and through the place name (though it is still possible to determine the place name as "Danville"). From the Shakers' reference to the work, however, it can be safely dated to

1805. What is remarkable about this piece is that it was printed in the same year that saw the arrival of Shaker missionaries Benjamin Seth Youngs, Issachar Bates, and John Meacham, who entered the state of Kentucky through the Cumberland Gap on February 25, 1805.³ The Shaker missionaries opened their gospel in Kentucky and Ohio throughout the year, and it may very well have been that the "Short Account of the ... Shakers" was printed in Danville in reaction to their presence, which was generally unwelcome.

The 1805 Danville printing of the text of the "*Short Account of the ... Shakers*" is nearly identical to the original 1795 imprint. The only minor differences are in the spelling of words or the lack of definite and indefinite articles. Regrettably, the surviving copy of the 1805 imprint contains only pages [1] and 2, so any additional text that may have been added contemporary to the arrival of the Shaker missionaries is not present. Despite its fragmentary nature, this humble imprint holds great importance as being the first of many hundreds of items printed by and about the Shakers following their 1805 mission to the West.

Notes

1. Benjamin Seth Youngs, *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, (Lebanon, Ohio: From the Press of John McClean, 1808), [5].
2. "A Short Account of the People Known by the Name of Shakers, or Shaking Quakers," *Theological Magazine* 1, no. 2 (Sept./Oct. 1795): [81]-87.
3. Benjamin Seth Youngs, *Diary*, 1805, 37. Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, Winterthur, Del., ASC 859.

See images on following pages.

VILLAGE DIALOGUES

BETWEEN

EMER LITTLEWORTH AND THOMAS NEWMAN, REV. MR.
LOVEGOOD, PARSON DOLITTLE AND OTHERS.

BY ROLAND HILL, A. M.

Thomas — See Master, what a deal of Weeds and Rubbish
we have got together within these few days ;—and when we
we got them all together, we shall burn them out of the Way.
May the Lord do the same in all our Hearts !

DIAL. II.

TO WHICH IS ADDED BY ANOTHER HAND,

An account of the People known by the name of

SHAKING QUAKERS.

DANVILLE.

(From the Theological Magazine.)

WHILE the historian is in general supplied with records of those whose histories he would collect, and is favored with many other written authorities, his way lies plain before him, and his work is partly prepared to his hand. But he who attempts the history of a people, or sect of people entirely new, labors under this disadvantage, of having no written author to consult, or authority to support him. Like the first traveller thro an unexplored region, his way lies thro an almost impervious wilderness, without a single way-mark to guide his steps; more especially, while he delineates the character of a sect, whose religion it is to despise letters, and as much as in them lies, suppress every written account of their profession or practice.

Knowing the weakness and wickedness of this world: the credulity, the malice, envy, and caprice of mankind, we may not attempt to delineate the character of any people or profession, merely from the tongue of common fame.

The facts which have fallen under the particular notice of the writer, those things which the Shakers publicly profess, and own to be facts, and those occurrences, the truth of which rests on credible evidence, shall now be arranged with as much conciseness and perspicuity as possible, leaving many doubtful occurrences to be hereafter developed by time, or buried in oblivion.

This singular religious sect of people called Shakers, or Shaking quakers, derived their name, partly from a distant likeness in them, to the people called Quakers, or Friends, and partly from an uncommon effect their extraordinary spirit has on their bodies, causing them at times to shake, or shudder, in a most surprizing manner.

**Photograph. “Shakers at Church,” September 20, 1885.
15.3 x 23.2 cm. pasted on board 24 x 28 cm.**

By Scott De Wolfe

The special collections at Hamilton College recently acquired a particularly important Shaker photograph. The image taken in 1885 is presumed to be the only nineteenth-century photograph of a Shaker meeting. On September 20, 1885, the Sabbathday Lake Church Family scribe described the event:

“Sabbath day. Our public meeting’s close today ‘A New Thing Under the Sun’ During the services this morning, a photographer came into the Meeting House, with Edwin Ricker and took a view of the meeting house, interior and of ... all the people assembled. A little disturbance was made by a woman having a fit, but we lived thro both scenes.”¹

The photographer was brought to the meeting by a member of the Ricker family, owners of the Poland Spring Inn. Poland Spring was an important summer vacation destination and was an increasing source of business for the Sabbathday Lake community. This close business relationship may have in part been responsible for facilitating the photographer’s access to the room. Unfortunately we do not know the name of the photographer.

The image documents the last years of open Shaker meetings where the world was invited to witness Shaker worship. Indeed, with the 1886 death of Elder Nehemiah Trull (pictured at the lower left facing the room), Sabbathday Lake closed their meetings to the public for over seventy years.² This photograph also documents Shaker clothing styles at the close of an era; soon thereafter the sisters’ kerchiefs were replaced by cloth yokes and many communities began to adopt more worldly fashions. Finally, the image was taken at the beginning of a prosperous era for the Sabbathday Lake Shakers. They had survived decades of financial hardships and recently had finally completed their large brick dwelling house. The members were under the leadership of Elder William Dumont and Eldress Elizabeth Noyes who would ably lead the society for more than forty years.

This image is quite rare, with the Sabbathday Lake Shaker library owning the glass negative. Only three prints appear to survive, including the Hamilton College copy.

Notes

1. Quoted in Elmer R. Pearson and Julia Neal, *The Shaker Image* (Pittsfield: Hancock Shaker Village, 1994), 200. The original quote is found in the Sabbathday Lake Church Family Journal for 1885, in the collection of the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Library.
2. Ibid.



Detail of the photograph. See next page for full image.

